

Week Ending Friday, September 27, 1996

Remarks at a Reception for Tom Bruggere in Portland, Oregon

September 20, 1996

The President. Thank you.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. You know——

Audience member. Twelve more years!

The President. When Al Gore and I started out together, he had a reputation of being too stiff. [Laughter] If anyone ever had told me 4 years ago that I would be counseling him about not being too rowdy, I never would have believed it. [Laughter]

We're having a good time here, Hillary and Tipper and Al and I. We love Oregon. We love to come here. We love what you're doing and what you stand for. I want to say that I'm deeply honored to be here today with Tom and Kelley and Maria and T.C. and their friends, with our candidates for Congress, Darlene Hooley and Mike Dugan, with the mayor and Congresswoman Furse, with all of you. But I want to say to you that I do not view, in all candor, this election as primarily a struggle of parties. I think, more than that, this election is primarily a definition of our country.

Once in a great while, our country has gone through profound periods of change in how we work, how we live, how we relate to one another, how we relate to the rest of the world. Everybody who thinks about it knows that this is a period like that.

There have been four or five such periods in our country's history. And you make these decisions, and when you make them, they dramatically impact 30 or 40 or 50 years and shape the country forever. And I want you to think about it like that. I do not want you to vote for any of these people because it would be nice if President Clinton had a Democratic Congress. It would be nice, but I don't want you to do that.

Instead, I want to build on what the Vice President said. I want you to define what you want your country to look like when we start the 21st century, what you want your country to look like when these children are our age, and then make your decision based on that. Forget about the politics of it; think about your country.

I was listening to Al talk and he did such a good job, I didn't have any idea what I was going to say. [Laughter] But I think what he was saying and what I would like to say to you is that there are these two polar opposite views competing for America's image of itself in this time of change. One is a unifying vision; the other is fundamentally a divisive vision. One says, "We're all in this together;" the other one says, "You're on your own. The Government's the problem." One says, "Let's build a bridge to the future;" the other says, "Let's build a bridge to the past, when times were simpler, and we didn't have to worry about all this." One says, "We believe you can do well by doing good." The other says, "Do-gooders always mess up the private economy." And you have to think about which you believe. I believe that the example of Tom Bruggere's life and success and the results achieved by the policies of our administration in the last 4 years make an overwhelming case for the unifying vision of our future as opposed to the divisive vision of our future.

Every time we try to do something to sort of spread opportunity and let the American people succeed at home and at work and give everybody a chance to live up to the fullest of their God-given potential, those who opposed it said it was big Government and it would mess up a one-car parade; we would weaken the economy; it would be inefficient; it would be this, that, and the other thing.

But 4 years later, yes, we passed family leave, and yes, we continue to protect the environment, but we have 10½ million new jobs, and we have—and I might add that the

job growth rate is faster than has occurred under any Republican administration in 70 years. But this is not about party. The things we are debating today don't fit within the old party labels. The new competing philosophy abandons a lot of what the Republican Party adhered to for 25 years.

But if you look at it, that's what's going on. They said, "Oh, if you don't let people continue to live on \$4.25 an hour minimum wage, you will just cost jobs." Well, October the 1st we'll get a chance to test that out, because 10 million people are going to get a pay raise. And you know—but in the same bill we proved that you could have a unifying vision.

Do you know what else was in that minimum wage bill? We also, in the minimum wage bill, increased the tax deductions that businesses get when they invest more in their own business to grow the economy. We have improved—we have given more tax relief for self-employed people to get health insurance. It wasn't either/or.

The bill also has a \$5,000 tax credit for people who will adopt children, because there are still a lot of kids out there that need homes. So it was pro-work, pro-business, and pro-family. It was a unifying vision.

When Tom helped his workers be better parents, he increased the productivity of his company; he didn't weaken it. That is our argument. Our argument is that we have been forced into too many false choices for too long by people who were too short-sighted, and the nature of the new economy is such that we can do best by doing the right things, that there must not be a dichotomy between what people have to do in raising up their children and what they have to do in raising up their work lives. And if there is, we lose from the beginning. If you have to choose one or the other, we're beat from the start. We believe we can do both.

We believe there must not be a dichotomy between preserving and, indeed, enhancing the environment and public health and growing the economy because if that is true, then that ultimately would spell the doom of every civilization, and many have been doomed because of the refusal to develop a unifying vision that would permit people to grow the economy in ways that are in harmony with

their natural surroundings. That's a fundamental choice you have to make.

We believe that the First Lady is right, that it does take a village to raise children, to build an economy, to build a country. Therefore, unlike the other folks, we don't think it was a waste of money to give 50,000 young people, like this young woman here, a chance to work in AmeriCorps to serve their communities and earn some money to go to college while they were doing it. We think that's a good thing to do.

They believe there's two kinds of money, the Government's money and your money, and the Government's money is money they've stole from you, and the more they give back to you, the better off you are, because the Government would mess up a one-car parade. We believe it's all your money.

And the question is, are there things we can do together that we cannot do alone? And that is the question. We cannot, by ourselves, guarantee equal access to college education. We cannot, by ourselves, guarantee more equal opportunities for children in the schools. We cannot, by ourselves, guarantee what the Vice President and Tom have worked for, which is to make sure there is equal access to technology, including access to the information superhighway, to all the children in all the schools of America. That's something we have to do together—together.

We cannot—let me just give you three examples. Christopher Reeve talked about this at our convention. We cannot, by ourselves, fund the research necessary to push back the barriers that are destructive of human existence. Just in the last few weeks, for the first time in history, laboratory animals with severed spines have shown movement in their lower limbs because of nerve transplants. It never happened before. You cannot afford to get that done by yourself. Together, we can fund that kind of research. We have doubled the life expectancy of people with HIV and AIDS in 4 years because of the more rapid—[inaudible]—you cannot afford to do that on your own. We just entered a partnership, the United States did with IBM—even IBM did not want to do it on its own—we're going to build a supercomputer that will do more calculations in a second than you can

do on your hand-held calculator at home in 30,000 years. We have to do that together.

But as we do these things, we change the whole nature of the future. The children in this audience will be doing jobs that have not been invented yet, many will be doing work that has not been imagined yet because of what we do together as well as what we do on our own.

So you have to decide that. You look around this room. Look at all this diversity in this room. Look how different we all are. Do you know how much of your time I spend as President, trying to get people around the world not to do destructive things because they can't live with even a limited amount of diversity, because they literally cannot exist, because they have to have a divisive vision of themselves and their lives, they've got to be thinking they're important because they're not someone else? That's what the deal in Bosnia is all about. That's what Northern Ireland's about. That's what the Middle East is about. That's what the slaughter between the Hutus and the Tutsis in Burundi and Rwanda was all about. All over the world.

That's what the church burnings are all about. When a synagogue is defaced or an Islamic center is burned, that's what it's all about. There are lots of folks that just can't get up in the morning and go through the day unless they've got somebody to look down on to make themselves feel bigger, a divisive view of the world.

Now, I am not being naive here. I don't pretend for a moment that there aren't tough decisions that have to be made, that there are lots of moments when there is no 100 percent perfect answer. But I'm telling you, where you go in life depends not only on all the details in dealing with the tough decisions, it depends on what your view is, how you look at this. And that's why I tell you, if you look at how the world is changing, going from the cold war to a global economy, if you look at the new security threats of the 21st century, terrorism, ethnic strife, the proliferation of dangerous weapons, organized crime and drug smuggling, they all cross national boundaries. We have to be unified in dealing with that. I asked the Vice President to head that commission to figure out how we could make our airports and our airlines

safer. We're dealing with a problem that every country has to deal with, so we have to work together on that.

If you look at the way the economy's going and the competition that we're in with people all around the world, we have to hold ourselves to international standards and then we have to work together to make sure we all do it.

If you think about all of us in this room, most of us would do well if there were no Government efforts of any kind. We would do okay. But we're doing a lot better because everybody else has a chance to make the most of their lives as well.

So I say to you, you're going to have 6 weeks and 4 days of television wars here in Oregon, and half of what's on there may be irrelevant. But this is a big deal. This is a huge deal. This is the last major election of the 20th century and the first election of the 21st century. Things have changed. We have to change. And America is going to go into that next century with either the unifying vision dominant or the divisive vision dominant.

That's what I want you to think about, not Democrats or Republicans or any of that. I want you to think about your country. And if you look at the life and career and work of this man, it would be hard to think of someone who could be a better poster boy for a unifying vision of America's future in the 21st century than Tom Bruggere.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:46 a.m. at the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry. In his remarks, he referred to Tom Bruggere, Democratic candidate for Senate, his wife, Kelley, and their children Maria and T.C.; Mayor Vera Katz of Portland; and actor Christopher Reeve. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Statement on Same-Gender Marriage

September 20, 1996

Throughout my life I have strenuously opposed discrimination of any kind, including discrimination against gay and lesbian Americans. I am signing into law H.R. 3396, a bill